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SUBJECT: KARACHI - SECRETARY LEAVITT MEETS WITH AGA KHAN OFFICIALS

¶1. (U) Summary: Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt met with senior Aga Khan University (AKU) faculty and administration members during his August 20 visit to Karachi. AKU officials discussed nursing programs and Pakistan's ongoing efforts to train health care professionals. The officials were concerned about the immigration of educated health care professionals from developing countries to the U.S. The university's provost called for closer ties to U.S. institutions and pointed out Pakistan's attractiveness as a locale for clinical research. End summary.

¶2. (U) On August 20, Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt held meetings with administrators and faculty members at Aga Khan University (AKU) in Karachi. After a lunch with senior AKU officials, including university President Firoz Rasul, Provost William Doe and Board Chair Ambassador Saidullah Khan Dehlavi, he met with around 40 senior faculty and staff members. Nairobi AKU officials participated in this session via conference call. Later in the afternoon, the Secretary held a private meeting with nine National Institutes of Health (NIH) grant recipients.

Nursing Needs

¶3. (SBU) AKU officials told the Secretary that, over its 25 year history, AKU had elevated the status of nursing in Pakistan, which had traditionally been regarded as a low status occupation. The university, President Rasul explained, offers a traditional nursing education program and has partnered with international universities, such as McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, to offer a doctorate degree in nursing.

¶4. (SBU) AKU also has a program in East Africa to advance the education of trained nurses of varying skill levels. This program includes an emphasis on leadership development for health care professionals. The university has begun emphasizing midwife training and is overseeing USAID funded prenatal and child health projects in Afghanistan. AKU has trained nurses from a number of other countries, including Egypt and Syria, and has become a role model for other developing countries, said Rasul.

¶5. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt pointed out that limited university capacity has contributed to a shortage of trained nurses. To address that problem, he stated that some U.S. hospitals educate nurses in-house who are then accredited by educational institutions based on the trainees' medical competencies. The internet could be used as a tool for the delivery of content based coursework to health care providers, he added. The Secretary stated that U.S. nursing programs focus on training nurses at various levels of expertise to meet community needs.

¶6. (SBU) Provost Doe said that discovering the needs of rural areas and then adapting technology and training that will work there has been a successful strategy in Pakistan. As an example, he described a drop in infant mortality that resulted from providing instruction to traditional birth attendants.

¶7. (SBU) One NIH grant recipient later explained to the Secretary that Pakistan's needs were the opposite of U.S. needs. Pakistan has long had many less skilled nurses working in rural areas, such as those that finish six month or one year training courses. The country is still in need of professionally educated nurses who have completed a full course of study, she added.

Loss of Talent Worrying

¶8. (SBU) One AKU faculty member (later echoed by an AKU official in Nairobi) lamented the loss of Pakistani medical professionals who stay in the U.S. after completing their education there. The faculty member asked the Secretary to consider holding regional classes and seminars, possibly in conjunction with AKU, to avoid giving medical professionals the chance to remain outside of Pakistan. The Secretary said that he supported plans to increase regional training activities and hoped to develop a closer relationship with AKU during his visit to move forward that goal. However, he cautioned that some programs required access to things that could not be transported, such as U.S. clinical settings. The USG will always welcome education in the U.S. as an important component of comprehensive training programs.

Call for Closer Ties to U.S. Institutions

¶9. (SBU) Referencing a new AKU joint degree program with Kabul University for pediatricians and surgeons, Provost Doe called for closer collaboration between AKU and U.S. institutions. He declared that Pakistan, with its rich variety of diseases and a large population, many of whom have never taken antibiotics, is fertile

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ground for clinical research involving international institutions.

¶10. (SBU) USG officials attending the AKU meetings:

- HHS Secretary Michael Leavitt
- Consul General Kay Anske
- William Steiger, Special Assistant to Secretary Leavitt
- Allyson Bell, Director of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Scheduling and Advance
- Mark Abdoo, Director, Office of Multilateral Affairs, DHHS
- Altaf Lal, DHHS Attache, New Delhi
- Kathleen McDonald, USAID, Embassy Islamabad
- Tim Hall, Pol/Econ Officer, Consulate General Karachi

¶11. (U) This cable has not been cleared by Secretary Leavitt.

ANSKE